Becoming an Art Teacher: Storied Reflections of Two Preservice Students

Kathleen Unrath
Daria Kerridge
University of Missouri

This descriptive research focuses on the teaching experiences of two preservice art education interns and the meanings they attributed to their student teaching field experience. Of interest is how these preservice teacher interns have experientially formulated ideas on what it means to be an art teacher and how their traits of altruism, artistic competence, and a sense of community have evolved into studied pedagogy. Better understanding the perspective of the preservice teacher and the crystallizing moments that confirm career choice informs the profession by shedding light on the developmental process of becoming an educator and how humanistic values transfer into professional practice.

Becoming an Art Teacher

It is critical to ask: What does it mean to teach? What triggers this professional choice? Clearly, each of us travels a slightly unique path in coming to the teaching profession, yet it seems that certain characteristics do indeed play a role in adherence to the profession (Darling-Hammond, 1998, 2000, 2007; Stronge, 2002). Indeed, voices of art teachers from Anderson’s Real Lives: Art Teachers and the Cultures of School (2000) reveal many of the “reasons for teaching that run the range from personal to social and from practical to theoretical and spiritual” (p. 2). Still other teachers hold themselves “responsible for the success of their students” (Stronge, 2002, p. 18), or even see themselves as “vicars of the culture” (Bruner as cited in Orlofsky, 2001, p. 83).

Upon completion of certification, two preservice art education interns were asked to take part in a series of semi-structured interviews in order to narrate their journey from student to degreed teacher and to articulate the discovery of meaningful pedagogical seeds which they carry from one role to the other as they become ‘mindfully embodied’ art educators. Field and Latta (2001) use the term “mindfully embodied” (p. 885) to refer to ownership of practical wisdom and that state of being open to unexpected experience, and therefore, “able to make discoveries, to learn from these, and begin the vital, living process of sensitive adjustment that we think is so essential to genuine teaching” (p. 889).

The narratives capture the reflective arts practitioner in action and inform art education’s preservice literature by demonstrating how teaching dilemmas, embedded in the microcosms of classroom life are lived, contemplated, and dealt with by emerging teachers in a small Midwestern urban context. And whether innate or learned, their individual inclinations for what Maxine Greene (1988) calls ‘attending to’ and what Field and Latta (2001) describe as...
the 'collective shaping of experience,' offer solace and comfort to the socially engaged profession.

The educational experience is a collective undertaking with learning taking place between people in dialogue (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1998; Greene, 1988). Paramount to the process is understanding and honoring the mutual exchange between teacher educator and preservice art educator where both “bring their own deep investments to education” (Britzman, as cited in Field & Latta, 2001, p. 892). It is within this framework that the present research has taken note of altruism, competence in art, and building community within the school setting, as traits emerging from the narratives of the two soon-to-be art teachers. These traits, bolstered by years of experience, are included in the many qualities recognized by Bond, Smith, Baker, and Hattie (2000) in their comprehensive meta-analysis of teacher expertise (data released through the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards).

Literature

Researchers in the field of education have considered student teaching the most significant component of teacher preparation programs (Brimfield & Leonard, 1983; Darling-Hammond, 1998, 2000, 2007; Dodds, 1985; Fenimore-Smith, 2004; Haring & Nelson, 1980; Lui, 2003; McDermott, 2002; Michell & Schwager, 1993; O’Sullivan, 1990; Orland-Barack, 2002; Paese, 1984; Schempp, 1985; Yost, 1997). Connelly and Claudinin (1988) review the literature concerning teacher reflection in order to graph the studies that “get inside teachers’ heads to describe their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values” (p. 14) while other researchers focus their inquiry specifically on the reflective teacher’s mental activity—the thinking process of the self-observer (Bergsgaard & Ellis, 2002; Brown, 1998; McLeskey & Waldron, 2004). Orland-Barack (2002) investigates a disturbing “discontinuity of the passage from student teaching to teaching” (p. 1) from the individual perspective of a first-year teacher, while other studies analyze the quality and categories of teacher reflections (Bergsgaard & Ellis, 2002; hooks, 1994; Lee, 2005; Miller, 1994; Schön, 1983; Zeicher & Liston, 1987). The present research details the personal narratives of new teachers as they retrace their steps up to, and through, the teaching internship but before moving into their first year of the profession.

Methodology

Bruner (1986) infers that narrative knowledge is storied knowledge; thus this study, following the descriptive research tradition, intentionally captured the reflective observations of student teachers as they made meaning about their teaching experience. The interview process provided, “a literary, narrative account and representation of lived experience through the telling and inscribing of stories” (Denzin, 1989, p. 11).

In considering the nature of thinking and learning of student teachers, Putnam and Borko (2000) observe, “learning and knowing are situated” (p. 4). Contextualized profiles of novice teachers ‘working out’ their practicum of teaching provide a unique collection of embodied knowledge and meanings. Utilizing Denzin’s (1989) methodology that seeks to biographically capture
metamorphosis and change through experience and storied epiphanies, this project sought to contribute to existing research about novice teachers.

The interview protocol was modeled after Dolbeare and Schuman’s Three-interview Series (Schuman, 1982) and Seidman’s (1998) three-part thematic qualitative interview series affording three consecutive 90-minute interviews wherein each participant spoke in broad terms about themselves, their student teaching experience, and their insights.

The participant group consisted of two university art education student teacher cases. Each participant’s unique meaning making narrative that emerged from the interview series was the contextualized phenomenon utilized as a case. Thus, this study investigates two cases—two units of analysis. Each participant’s personal storied knowledge revealed through the interview series was the ‘bounded system’ for case analysis (Merriam, 1988, 2001; Yin, 1994).

The interview process was situated, and in each case, the “specific geopolitical context [of the] fieldwork” as intended by Lal (1999, p. 106) was that of known former instructor to known former student. A relationship of trust and respect had been built up over the course of 3 years within the framework of a university program; however, the two respondents were also ‘situated’ outside a position of subordination to their former teacher in that both had terminated their educational program, and thus, the dialogue was one of art teacher colleagues. Both full interview series took place during the summer following completion of their student teaching practicum and prior to entry into the profession.

The study took place in a large Midwestern university town made up of cultural diversity but surrounded by large expanses of semi-rural farming land. The researchers acknowledge this limitation, however, as Ladson-Billings (2001) noted in Crossing Over to Canaan, the presence of a small town Midwesternner among her Teach for Diversity (TFD) student teachers “brought a different perspective to the group by reminding us that students in rural areas and small towns also suffer from stereotypes about what it means to be normal” (p. 43).

Discussion

The participants for this qualitative study were chosen because of their commitment to art education and their diverse backgrounds. The narratives considered here highlight the thoughts of two distinct students from a single art education program. Their backgrounds express basic similarities such as age (early twenties), scholastic path (BFA degrees), and a capacity for reflection. Similar also were their years of background in learning projects: One worked with special needs children, and the other worked as a facilitator in a before- and after-school program. Ladson-Billings (2001) had noted this same commonality among her eight TFD student teachers where each had taken “advantage of the opportunity to work with people in a teaching-learning environment” (p. 52) prior to coming into the program. Differences between the participants resided in gender, ethnicity (European-American and Korean-American), and geographical histories (rural-Midwestern upbringing as opposed to foreign-born and foreign-raised child of a military household).
Two texturally rich portraits of the novice art educator emerged from the interview dialogues. Each participant with a particular background, a particular cultural imprinting, and a unique aesthetic sensitivity came to be a part of the preservice art education community. The sequential dialogues, wherein both student-teacher interns elaborated on their lived experiences of learning, imparting, and reflecting were carried out with deep respect and art field awareness, facilitating an open dialogue (Stokrocki, 1997). The taped narratives were transcribed and analyzed for emerging themes.

The passages from the interviews with the two soon-to-be art teachers were collected on the following dates: June 22, June 29, and July 06, 2005 for James; July 20, July 27, and August 03, 2005 for Catherine. All excerpts cited in the study’s text came from the body of interview material and were considered personal communications; each excerpt was attributed to either James or Catherine.

The Interview Series

The narrative accounts used here describe each participant’s personal navigation (Sternberg & Spear-Swerling, 1998) towards the teaching profession from youth through to the experientially rich preservice teacher self. The first interview focused on the larger view with participants reflecting on their lives and relating how they first embraced not only the fine arts, but also, the desire to teach. In the second interview, the perspective narrowed to a detailed account of their day-to-day student teaching experiences. In the third interview, the participants referenced their understandings of teaching as they applied meaning to their preservice experiences.

The Interview Participants

Student portrait n. 1: James. The first participant was a young man with a rich bi-cultural heritage who came to a very rural corner of the Midwest in his high school years after living for a long period in Japan and southern Europe. After high school, James attended his home state university and completed a dual degree in art education and ceramics. As he explored his experiences of artmaking and art teaching, his words often linked creativity to competence and passion. In the first interview, detailing his life history, James remembered being an independent person in his youth, and above all, being an artist.

I have always done well at drawing and I can remember in Texas, in second grade—we were at a Church and there was a Garfield picture on the wall and I just looked at it and drew it. The adults thought I had taken the picture down and traced it, and I [said]: “No, I drew it.” In school too, we did a Christmas tree topper, not a star—it was a choir boy singing, he had little arms and he was holding a little book, but his face was pushed back, and you could just see his open mouth and the top of his nose, but I drew the little ball in your throat and everybody [asked]: “Wow, you drew that?”—I just [drew] that little extra thing and the teacher noticed and all the kids noticed.

Recognition of artistic merit facilitates self-esteem, and when praise and recognition are steadily sprinkled through the course of one’s youth and scholastic career, the result is a strong sense of self (Bandura, 1986, 2001; Maslow, 1943) and a defined aesthetic inclination: the roots of competence in artistry.
In the second interview, wherein the day-to-day experience of being a student teacher was discussed, James confirmed his belief in the joy of artmaking and his need to revel in the art process: “There should be joy in whatever you are doing”. As a student art instructor, James saw the need to share and encourage the joyous spontaneity of art-making especially in very young children.

In elementary school there is a different kind of joy and satisfaction than in the high school—the [elementary] kids are just so happy that they glued [something on paper]—it could be off the page—but they would say: “Look at this! This is what I made!” [The satisfaction] just sort of reflects off them on to you and you are excited because they are excited. And it is just as important what they were doing [compared to the artmaking of the high school students] because what they did was important to them—they enjoyed it and they were proud of it.

There is a neighboring relationship between artmaking and identity, and as Maslow (1943) indicates, the discovery of one’s identity comes from engaging the self. In the area of artmaking, self-discovery is often connected to making creative decisions about the content, form, and material of your craft (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). James enriched the discourse of artmaking/art-teaching epiphanies as he repeatedly linked the creative impulse to passion, a strong thematic thread in his narratives. When asked to attribute personal significance and meaning to the process of becoming an art teacher, James discussed passion as a core quality of the professional art educator:

Looking back I have always felt that education should help people be passionate about life. If I am in the art department and I see someone who is passionate about art, about what they are doing, I think, that transfers. When a teacher loves art, and loves to learn and is always looking for an answer, a natural thing happens, they [the students] fall in love with it [the art form] and just naturally realize that they [the students] can also be passionate about whatever they do.

Student portrait n. 2: Catherine. The second participant, a young woman, was born and raised in a rural farming community of the Midwest. After receiving a dual Bachelor’s degree in the fine arts and psychology from a large urban university, she returned to her hometown and worked with special needs students at a middle school. Her entry into the educational setting as a paraprofessional was triggered by her lifelong relationship with profound disability in the immediate family. Recalling her decision to seek teaching certification, she remarked: “I think I had always thought about being a teacher—[musing]—it is largely like being a counselor, but after working as a teaching aide for a year, I realized that I wanted to teach!” Catherine, with her dual degree and some classroom experience brought exceptionally strong skill sets to her studies: competence in the content area, insightful psychological overview, and empathetic acuity. In describing her childhood, the significance of the student-teacher relationship seemed to have already been guiding Catherine’s propensity to teach:
I remember a little moment [when] a teacher ‘pointed’ me out—it was Introduction to Spanish in Jr. High—I had actually won a candy bar for having the least improvement in participation [because] I wouldn’t say anything…ever. Then we all had to go to the front of the class and read [out loud] something we wrote. I still remember what I said: “me llamo es…” She [the teacher] corrected me and then said: “You are a diamond in the rough!” And I will always remember that!

Catherine critically reflected on how a teacher’s open recognition of a student’s ability can help the student identify his/her own potential thus helping the student to value him/herself. Fostering personal relationships and building community emerged from the progressive interview series as a continual theme in her narratives. In the second interview, while focusing on her student teaching internship, Catherine reflected on the art classroom as a world in itself, where “I felt I could express things”. The idea of what she herself needed: “the art room as a safe place” (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005, p. 148) where “making art is potentially a way of making a personal world” (p. 143), figures in her vision of teaching as both a personal and a shared event.

[Building] community is hardest to do with the shy kids—they are so quiet and just sort of blend in. One, a girl named Esther, was so talented [but] she never said a word. She stayed in at recess and [sometimes] they open up when they come in at recess—usually it is the kids with a stronger work ethic and so I heard her talking and I realized what kind of kid she is—I knew the other girls and I think to myself: “How did I not know her?” And then she made these foil sculptures of people—two people in chairs with a bookshelf with all these little foil books on it. I kept it and took pictures of it and I said: “Esther … how did I not know this was in you!!!! I can’t believe I didn’t know you until now—I didn’t know you are such an artist! Look at all those details!!!!

These critical reflections demonstrated Catherine’s deep need to celebrate her students through recognizing and encouraging their talents. Just as high school teacher Gayla Buyukas commented on the longevity of the act of teaching: “I get fundamental enrichment in being tied to the process of their growth” (Anderson, 2000, p. 89), novice educator Catherine similarly remarked on her beginning role in the large landscape of teaching: “I realized how many different roles there are in life for teachers and that, in life, each one is of value to kids and their learning. I was good at helping people with their art work and I love that feeling of helping them discover something”. Aware of the empowerment that had been bestowed upon herself as a young person in Spanish class, Catherine has now embraced the teaching profession and was becoming a sincere and spontaneous agent of empowerment within the classroom context. She seems to have realized that inclusive respect and empathy within the educational setting are natural building blocks for the human community.

In the third interview, wherein she conferred meaning to the act of teaching, Catherine related another epiphany, the overlapping of teaching and learning, as she spoke about one of her former art professors:
She said she learned from us and she was taught by us and I thought: she thinks like a ‘teacher’—not just a professor that is a painter and comes and talks to us every once in while, she was really approaching us as a teacher and I thought: ‘This is what a teacher is—a teacher is a mentor.’ And to me this mentor was also an artist and I knew I wanted to be that kind of teacher.

Certain traits, such as keen observation accrued from years of schooling in the fine arts and an inclination for giving, developed through different but equally persuasive, familial responsibilities, provided both participants with the empathy and synchrony needed to choose the teaching profession. Both soon-to-be teachers embraced Anderson and Milbrandt's (2005) belief that art-making furthers “social as well as personal development and that personal reflection also becomes a respected and important activity” (p. 28).

Themes of Reflective Artistry

Analysis revealed shared thematic threads related to teaching art. Each participant discussed the nature of teaching and grounded their insights in lived experiences. Their storied perceptions testified to three thematic traits that emerged in analysis that are also emphasized in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) as desired art teacher characteristics: (a) altruism, or “a sense of mission”; (b) area competence, or “a deep knowledge of the subject” coupled with a “passion for learning and teaching”; and (c) sense of community, or “multidimensional perception” (Bond, Smith, Baker, & Hattie, 2000, pp. 19-32).

Altruism

It is not that they recognize me—it is that I recognize them. (James)

The dualistic character of these two novice art educators, impassioned as they are by both the fine arts and teaching, is strengthened by a vein of altruism present in the interview narratives. There is a decidedly rich component of mentorship and compassion surfacing in their concept of the classroom teacher. Both interviewees possess that artistic instinct to bestow meaning on things, things made or said by the student, which, in its wider context, bestows meaning on the student as a significant individual. As revealed in the following excerpt, even when working as a cashier, teaching was always present as an innate desire:

I realized that it wasn’t something wrong with me that I couldn’t run the register, they had not taught me! And I remember there was this new girl trying to figure it out—I could feel her suffering. Teachers have that natural intuition about people and feelings: the inter- and intra-personal intuition—like the girl at the register, I knew she was shy and I knew the intimidation of what she was feeling and I felt I knew how to explain things to her. (Catherine)

Shaping the epiphany moment is the sense that an educative experience is, as Dewey explains, preparation for an “experience of a deeper and more expressive quality” (Dewey as cited in Jackson, 1998, p. 6). As Catherine expressed it: “I
realized that teachers are interesting caring people, they are thinkers and have the natural ability to have figured things out about people.”

The fine arts was a strong undergraduate degree choice for both—culminating in a BFA degree in ceramics for one and a BFA in painting for the other. However, feeling they also had “profound messages to convey as educators” (Congdon, 2005, p. 145), each made the distinct decision to become a teacher:

If I had to pick between being a studio artist or a teacher, I would be a teacher—I would give up studio art—because you can’t be both successfully. You can’t be [both] the teacher you want to be and the artist, so, I’d rather be the best teacher I could possibly be, because [in teaching] I am giving back, I’m helping. (James)

I realized I wanted to be someone that really designed full lessons and worked with kids every day. I would [have liked] to be a Professor of Art but [now] I would prefer to be a [school] teacher—I would be proud to be a teacher. (Catherine)

The emerging teacher’s educational experience embraces the long journey from K-12 through university years. In reality, each soon-to-be teacher has been constructing meaning within the field of education for most of their lives while living through the multi-faceted process related to being taught. Acknowledging this and recognizing students as “discerning participant observers….hold[ing] strong opinions about effective instruction” (Stout, 1993, p. 34) is crucial for novice and experienced teachers alike and indicates respect and reverence for the profession. As one participant stated while reflecting on a studio course moment:

A teacher read us an ancient Chinese text about a plum blossom. I remember thinking he had really planned our lesson. [He was] a real intellectual teacher and I was in awe! He didn’t just come in and have us draw: it wasn’t about whose work turned out best, instead, it was about thinking, and that was the best part—talking [and thinking] about painting. (Catherine)

**Competency: The Teaching of Art**

Reflective habits of mind are tools of the effective teacher (Schön, 1983). Extensive training in the fine arts (as BFA students) where attentive observation and reflection follow, one upon the other in a creative spiral, had already become a practiced intellectual process for the two teacher interns. James shared an experience during his high school internship when he was trying to help his students expand their thinking about the properties of clay as a medium.

They touched the clay and were drawing with the wooden tool—and I would say ‘maybe that is the outline and you’re going to start filling it in, now you can build it up and Oh Yeah! Take advantage of the properties of the clay because if you want to draw, there is paper and pencil, but if you use this three dimensional material you have the chance to build it up and out and get that texture that you can’t get with drawing … this is clay and this is what it is for. (James)
“The conversation that an artist has with his or her artwork is an internal reflective dialogue—could it be possible that artists are more reflective by nature and experience?” (Unrath, 2007, p. 105). Both Catherine and James already own their craft and adhere to the artistic reflective habit which they now apply to the art of teaching: just as color fields and earthly shapes have always fed their aesthetic inquisitiveness, now the teaching tasks prompt them to seek thoughtful classroom solutions and creatively “manage many agendas simultaneously” (Hoy & Spero, 2005, p. 353).

Actually in one of my last lessons [5th grade working with the figure], I told them we were going to learn a really cool [technique]—something that you usually don’t learn until college—about measuring the body and comparing length using your pencil. They got really excited. It was meaningful to me that they can learn important things, things that I did not learn until later. It has to do with confidence in what they can do—instilling your confidence in them. (Catherine)

Integral to the teaching of art is recognition of art’s primal worth in the sense that it can empower. Catherine’s observation from the third interview that “[art] teachers know art’s positive impact” echoes Freedman’s (2007) belief that “art educators have long known that art helps students understand the human condition through their investigations of themselves, particularly when students find their artistic strengths and are allowed to develop them” (p. 214).

Important also is fostering the students’ familiarity with materials, and thus, encouraging an ease of experimentation. James remembered a moment of self delight through creativity in his student years: “I sprinkled the glaze on and it turned a bluish tint—little sparkling freckles—and I thought, this is my own invention.” Typically, art teachers learn to create an environment where creative risk-taking can produce happy accidents by allowing the student artists to be open to possibilities and “to see ‘failure’ as necessary to the experimental, hands-on, exploratory nature of making art—in short, to see it not as failure but as a learning experience” (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005, p. 150).

Of course anybody that has been in ceramics knows this, but I remember in my first ceramics class, everything was so new to me and I was just experimenting with the stains and the slips, mixing things…. I still do it. Things happen completely by accident. But it is what you do with the accidents—that is creative problem solving, no matter what field you are in. (James)

Competency: The Art of Teaching

Teaching itself is neither predetermined nor inanimate. It is a wonderfully flexible act wherein the reflective process is “an endless journey for the forever becoming art teacher” (Unrath & Nordlund, 2006, p. 3). Reflective teachers are alive; they ponder, they question, they strategize, and above all, they learn: teachers who are not learners cannot teach (Unrath, 2007). Interviewee James recognized that he had chosen the right profession and felt it had to do with knowing his calling as an artist: “I knew it and everybody else knew it” and also as a teacher: “I broke [the task] down step by step and she just looked at me
and said: “You are a really good teacher!” The study asserts that teaching skills in combination with the ability to share passion for art are essential qualities for a nascent art educator. This combination was apparent in the two teachers selected for this study.

I think it was that moment when [my art professor] stated how much she had liked teaching us! Her saying how much she had learned from us [made me] realize that she didn’t just teach us but that she was listening to us and we could feel that she was learning from us and that was the relationship part! I thought ‘I want to be that kind of teacher’. (Catherine)

In art education programs, preservice students are encouraged to reflect on the meaning of teaching as they seek to comprehend their experiences as students, in addition to their initial experiences as instructors. Emerging also from these student teacher experiences is the importance of “knowledge about the nature of the task as well as the type of processing demands that it will place upon the individual” (Livingston, 1997, p. 1).

I realized how daunting and horrible it could be for the students that don’t think they can do art—they struggle with every line! In other subjects they probably [excel and] have that feeling of a pre-conceived idea. I always had the feeling I was figuring things out for myself—and [this means] I must have had good teachers. (Catherine)

The preservice teachers learn to elaborate and analyze firsthand experiences in a program wherein mindful teaching practices are promoted through journaling and discussion, and where reflective teaching affords the potentiality of always becoming (Unrath & Nordlund, 2006). They are taught to build upon their perceptions and inform their insights by tracing conceptual ideas back to big ideas in the literature thus gaining ownership of what it means to teach.

You observe all these teachers [in field experience] and then you student teach half like them and half like yourself and only later you start thinking: ‘Is that the right thing to do…?’ There is a lot of questioning going on but there is the struggle to survive every day and you are trying to make time to reflect but you don’t always have time. (Catherine)

Building Community

The artist is a person of foresight and is often a leader and a giver; the ‘artist as teacher’ opens sensory perception to others and promotes participation among the group. And since the art process binds the physical world with the inner, the outer perceptions with inner emotions, the effect is holistic and inclusive (hooks, 1995). Artmaking, like writing and journaling, “creates an occasion to think and progresses as an intimate act of discovery” (Stout, 1993, p. 1) leading to, as one participant revealed, the inevitable human contact of the teaching experience:

[T]he content of the art project was a topic that they ‘never talked about’: I gave them a lot of different ideas and [using myself] I said ‘I was playing ball with my dad and that was something I looked forward to…’ and then I explained that if I was making an art piece about this
I could do something where my dad and I catch something. Some students had been discussing really personal topics—things that were happening in their lives and when they realized that I was doing the same, it gave them that freedom. They are at that time when they want to express themselves but [wonder]: “How can you do it in a safe way?” And this [the art form] was the way a lot of them saw was safe. It was a shock to see that there was so much [going on] in their lives—like the kid who is going through divorce and another girl who actually did a piece on her father who had committed suicide—they realized that they could do it—they could use art to speak emotionally about some inner turmoil. (James)

Building on a strong sense of altruism these preservice art education interns were able to connect with their students. Their empathetic inclinations placed them among a community of learners that centers on the reflective act and holistic teaching practices. As Catherine observed: “I realized that knowing and relating to the kids makes community and I felt the power of that connection with them—I knew about their social groups and I knew who liked who and who brought what for lunch. [Knowing them] makes them more ready to learn from you.”

Through a cyclical process of learning, enacting, and reflecting, these novice teachers have experientially constructed the craft of teaching within the student internship. Without doubt, review and reflection are the cornerstones of art education curriculum and help the preservice teachers attribute meaning to the daily life occurrences in the decision rich arena of classroom settings. As seen in the words of the participating interns, reflective practice had enabled them to step back and consider how art-making, whether individual or collective, leads to personal discovery and empowerment, both the student’s and the instructor’s.

I could tell when they were really working and thinking about their work—one kid was doing his artwork about asthma….”I want to make lungs” and he was sitting there carving into the lungs; “Now, how can I make ribs?” They were working and talking about the work and about themselves: “I’m really shy” or “my hair’s covering my face”…but you could tell by the work, by the time [spent] and by the care they had in it, that it was going to be important. (James)

Within the classroom community it is important to achieve a sense of belonging—letting each learner have a presence and a voice. Psychologically, the gift of being ‘attended to’ and recognized as an individual empowers the self and encourages learning: “it is something—in class—to be recognized” remarked James, while Catherine described this as “little moments of feeling special”.

Additionally, recognizing students as contributing individuals sets the tone for creating an ethical class and a community of learners. Students when recognized are drawn to group activities, participation, and shared moments. As Catherine reflected: “I think the things I remember most were the positive responses from the students—seeing them all excited or really engaged in what
they were doing”. Again, from the interviews emerged this altruistic approach to teaching—the benevolent eye, the caring—so present in the teaching styles being developed by these two preservice interns. As Catherine explained:

There is no pressure like other kids near them that are ahead of them.
Some of these kids have social problems—low self esteem. Lots of times I start a lesson by asking ‘Well, just what is going to happen if things fall apart—is it the end of the world?’ I am trying to prevent trauma.

Conclusions

In the sphere of education, reflection fosters accountability. It confirms the importance of the act of teaching and examines outcomes with the evolution of a pedagogical approach in mind. Reflection in education often brings the awareness that perceptive empathy and altruistic zeal are the foundations of good teaching ethics and confirm the truism that “teaching is an act of respect for others and a desire to share [one’s] own enthusiasm for visual arts” (in Campbell, 2005, p. 61).

This descriptive study gave voice to candid reflections on teaching, and also on being taught, by two preservice art educators. Pedagogical insights strengthened their assumptions and provided the study with a framework of understanding as several major themes emerged. This sequential inquiry as to the nature of the novice art teacher in the act of becoming professional, knowledgeable, and articulate illustrates an evolutionary path in which altruism, competence, and building community can be seen as keystones of teaching.

Through recollections and storied epiphanies (Bruner, 1997; Denzin, 1989), the words of these two novice teachers inform the profession. Each exhibited an elevated sense of dedication to teaching and strong empathetic values. And, whether by character of the person or by accumulative wisdom of scholarship and pre-teaching service, both participants seemed to have already exhibited a few of the attributes of exemplary teachers (Bond et al. 2000) such as “deep understanding” and “respect for students” or altruism, “use of knowledge” and “passion for teaching and learning” or competence, and lastly, “multidimensional perception” or community, which ties into what Maxine Greene (1978, 1988) calls ‘awakeness’ and Schön (1983) calls ‘reflectiveness’.

Through their words, we gleaned the highly reflective nature of their approach to learning and teaching, the passion toward their calling, and the holistic character of their pedagogy. Their individual perspectives are presented here in hopes of shedding light on the development of the novice art teacher as she commences the grand journey and purposefully engages creative pedagogical practices with the intent of adding artistry to competence (Greene, 1978; Henderson, Hutchison, & Newman, 1998).

The meaningful transition from observant student to mindfully embodied teacher is seen in the following response given to the question of “How would you express as a metaphor your experience of being a teacher?”

It would be like a wood fire [kiln]. You don’t know what [glaze] you are going to get but you know it is always nice. Each piece is different. You can think of that [wood fire] flame as passion—the passion you are
trying to show them and when the flame hits the pots it leaves a mark. It is unique. [The flame] bounces everywhere and hits on this piece and then that piece, leaving a mark—it might be a little spot or a bigger spot but it is there and they are all different. You don’t know what you’re going to get—but you know you’re going to get something good. Yeah, the pots are like the students. (James)

References
Becoming an Art Teacher: Storied Reflections of Two Preservice Students


Kathleen Unrath and Daria Kerridge


